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LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINR ER

SUBJECT: OSMAN SALEH MOHAMMED APPOINTED NEW MINISTER OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (U) The Government of Eritrea (GSE) announced April 18 the appointment of Osman Saleh Mohammed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The position of Minister of Foreign Affairs has been vacant since the August 2005 death of former minister Ali Said. Simultaneously the GSE announced that Semere Russom, the Mayor of Asmara would replace Osman as the Minister of Education.

¶12. (C) Comment: The fact that the GSE has waited for twenty months to fill the vacancy at the MFA speaks volumes about the importance of the ministry in Eritrea's foreign policy decision making. Foreign policy here is still run by the Office of the President and shaped by President Isaias Afwerki with the help of a few key loyalists and the significant engagement of the National Security Office on operational decisions (such as the granting of agreement, issuance of visas, and approval of diplomatic travel to name a few). The appointment of Osman Saleh Mohammed is unlikely to change that equation. End comment.

BIO NOTES

¶12. (C) Osman Saleh Mohammed became the Minister of Education following the establishment of the State of Eritrea in 1993. Born in 1948, he was educated at Haile Selassie University. A fighter during the struggle for Eritrean independence, he served as the Head of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) schools in Sudan and Head of the EPLF Education Department. He also served from 1987 (1993 as the Commissioner for Eritrean Refugee Affairs before becoming the Minister of Education. He is a high ranking member of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). As the Minister of Education he was responsible for the development of the transfer of all 12th grade education to the Sawa training facility. He is rumored to be the mastermind behind the closing of the University of Asmara, after engaging in numerous arguments with the University Deans. He is reportedly extremely loyal to President Isaias, and has been called a "yes" man. He is a devout Muslim, and one acquaintance of his described him as straight-forward and easy. Another said he was calm and the "kind of guy you can talk to." Previously, he was married to the Minister of Justice, Fawzia Hashim, however they were divorced in

1993/94. He remarried and has several young children with his second wife.

¶3. (C) Semere Russom, born in 1943 is a former teacher. He is reported to have a PhD in Education from the University of Oklahoma, although some claim he never completed his studies there. He reportedly left the U.S. in the mid-1970s to return to Eritrea to participate in the struggle. From 1996 to 2000 he served as Eritrea's Ambassador to the United States and upon returning to Eritrea he was the Director for European Affairs for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2002 he left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and became the Mayor of Asmara and the Governor/Administrator of the Central Region/Maekel Zoba. He has a reputation for being impolite and disrespectful. He was married, however, his wife reportedly left him and she and the daughter live in the U.S. He currently lives in Asmara with his girlfriend and two children (parentage unknown).

DeLisi